Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 16 Number 4 April 2019

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 28th April 2019: Nehru Zoological Park, 6.30AM.

Established in October 1959 and opened to the public in October 1963, the 380-acre Zoo, located adjacent to the Mir Alam Tank, offers its denizens a variety of habitats, including patches of forest, a water body, grassland, etc. Not surprisingly, the zoo has usually yielded a good selection of bird sightings. The various enclosures hold a lot of small ground and tree birds, as well as a number of water birds. Eurasian Thick-knees have been known to breed near the Sambhar enclosure. There have been several interesting sightings and observations in the past, and this trip should be no exception. This will be a half-day trip. Carry snacks and water as usual. Most important: Please avoid plastic carry bags and containers. Let us all make it a habit to say no to plastic!

For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532). As usual, please let her know if you need a lift, and if you can accommodate extra passengers. Non-members are requested to donate Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. Our new T-Shirts and Caps will be available for sale; T-Shirts are Rs. 450/- each and Caps are Rs. 250/-.

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Dr G Samuel Sukumar, Director (Geology) (Retd), Geological Survey of India, on "Geology and the role of a Geologist". Thursday, 18th April 2019, 6.00PM: Goethe Zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Dr Sukumar, our Life Member, is not only a keen bird watcher, but also an excellent photographer. His talk promises to be extremely interesting and educative, and will focus on the mineral resources of Telangana and A.P. He will enlighten us regarding different types of rocks that exist on top as well as under the earth which form the mineral wealth of a nation - coal, iron, gold, diamonds, aluminum, zinc, copper, to name just a few – and will talk about the techniques of exploration and how to locate what exists and where.

AVIAN EXPEDITION IN EASTERN GHATS
Trip Report – Lambasinghi, January 4-6, 2019

Shilka Chaudhari

The group during the trip (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

The Eastern Ghats is known for its pristine forests and dense canopies. It is home to some amazing birdlife. Hence a two-and-a-half-day avian quest was planned and organized by Vikram for a group of 26 members early in the new year. On January 4th, we started in the evening from Hyderabad by Godavari Express and reached Vizag the next morning. An AC coach was arranged for the trip and accommodation was provided in a hotel close to Ramakrishna Beach on the first day.

Season: Winter Temperature: 15°C to 26°C

First leg: **Dali Cheruvu, Teelineelapuram and Naupada Swamps**

After a hearty breakfast, our journey began from Vizag to our first destination of the day, **Dali Cheruvu** in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh, a distance of 115km which we covered in around 3 hours. Walking the last stretch to the lake along an unpaved road, the common species we came across were Indian Roller, Green Bee-eater, Blue-tailed Bee-eater and Black Drongo.

Blue-tailed Bee-eater
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Little Grebe with chick (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Cotton Pygmy-goose (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

We crossed a small village settlement to reach the huge Dali lake, which was covered with lilies, lily pads and lotus. The muddy trail had the lake on one side and paddy fields/cultivation, mango and banana plantations on the other.

The water bird species we noticed were Common Coot, Little Grebe, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Bronze-winged Jacana, Wigeon, Cotton Pygmy-goose and Little Cormorant. The lake had Spot-billed Pelicans as well.

Bronze-winged Jacana
(Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Spot-billed Pelican, Cotton Pygmy-goose & Common Coot
(Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Purple Heron (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Walking further down the trail, we came across Indian Pond Herons, a Purple Heron well camouflaged in the surroundings, Cattle Egrets, Alexandrine Parakeets and a Southern Coucal. A Brahminy Kite was also seen flying at high altitude, and White-breasted Kingfishers were a common sighting.

White-breasted Kingfisher (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

On our way back to the coach, Barnali and Manjira came across birds like Chestnut-tailed Starling and Yellow-billed Babbler.

Chestnut-tailed Starling (Photo: K Karthik Sai)

We had lunch in a town named Tekkali, and then headed towards the **Telineelapuram Bird Sanctuary**. Telineelapuram is a village situated in Ichchapuram, a Mandal headquarters in the Srikakulam district. The place is visited by a lot of migratory birds. We were thrilled to see the colonies of Spot-billed Pelicans and Painted Storks in the village.

Painted Stork colony (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Painted Stork adult (above) and chicks (below) (Photos: K Karthik Sai) *(Note: The photographer confirms that the photos were taken from a safe distance)*

Nylon nets were tied to some of the trees, which served the purpose of protecting new fledglings falling down from their nests. Surekha remarked in dismay that the number of trees and the count of birds had drastically come down compared to her earlier visit around 3 years back. The reason for this decline could be attributed to deforestation and human habitation. During a brief discussion with Shafaat uncle and Vikram regarding these birds flying down from Siberia and other European nations, I was informed that these bird species could be residents and not migratory as informed by tabloids or webpages.

The last spot to be covered late that evening was **Naupada Swamps**. We sighted and photographed species like Common Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilts, Red-wattled Lapwings and Pond Herons. Calling it a day, we headed back to Vizag.

Little Egret (Photo: K Karthik Sai)

Black-winged Stilt (Photo: K Karthik Sai)

Second Leg: **Kondakarla Bird Sanctuary and Lambasinghi**

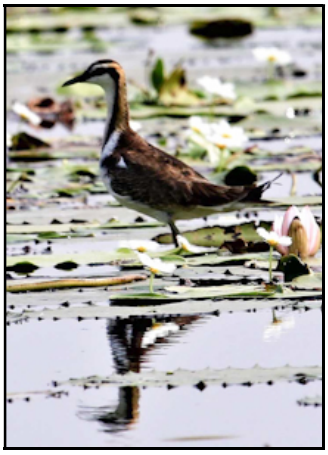
The group at Kondakarla Ava (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Early the next morning, some of the group members visited the popular Ramakrishna Beach. We (my father and I) spent around 40 minutes in a park next to the beach and got to see the glorious sunrise with the backdrop of Bay of Bengal. After breakfast we headed towards **Kondakarla Ava** lake, which is the second largest freshwater lake in the state. Located in the foothills of the Eastern Ghats, it is situated 50km from Vizag. The lake is home to a diverse array of flora and fauna.

Barn Swallow (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

One of the boats (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

The serene lake was surrounded by coconut and palm trees and green hills all around. The lake water was full of lotus flowers and lilies. Barn Swallows were observed cruising low, flying just inches above the water for insects. We hired 4 boats (2 pairs of boats tied together with the help of sticks and ropes) to explore the fresh water lake and enjoy the beauty of water birds. The few notable species we came across, besides the Barn Swallows, were Little Cormorant, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Purple Swamphen, Indian Moorhen, a lone Purple Heron and several Indian Pond Herons.



Pheasant-tailed Jacana
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Purple Swamphen (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Indian Pond Heron (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

The fishermen use palm logs converted into canoes to ferry villagers across and to take tourists on fun rides. We enjoyed our ride too. After clicking a number of interesting snaps we decided to take our lunch break.

Later in the afternoon, we headed to Lankapakala. On our hilly drive, we saw a number of tourist camps around, all littered with plastic. It was a sad sight.

We were greeted by the Forest Officer Mr Krishna Babu. The Forest Department had arranged lovely evening snacks and piping hot ginger tea in the cold weather. Sightings of Tricolored Munia, Common Mynas perched on top of a dry shrub, and Plain Prinia flying over the water, were noted. Late in the evening, we decided to return for an overnight stay in a hotel in Narsipatnam town.

Common Myna (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Third Leg: **Chintapalle Forest**

At 5:30AM on the last day, we kickstarted our journey to **Lambasinghi** which is about 31 km from Narsipatnam. Lambasinghi is popularly known as Kashmir of South India, and is also called the second Ooty of the South, as mentioned by our coach driver. It is a popular tourist destination.

A coffee plant (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

On reaching the place, the enthusiastic birding team alighted from the coach to take some group snaps and to enjoy the chilly morning weather. Mr Krishna Babu had arranged for our birding expedition in the dense forests of Kothapalli and Lankapakala in the Chintapalle plateau. The habitat consisted of moist deciduous and evergreen forests and coffee and pepper plantations. On reaching the forest we were greeted by Grey Wagtails on the street near a trail. Further down the moist trail, we were delighted to hear the calls (*kutroo…kutroo)* of a Brown-headed Barbet.

Red-whiskered Bulbul (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

The commonest birds in these habitats were the Bulbul species. The Red-vented and Red-whiskered Bulbuls were seen flying over the treetops. The other species we encountered were Vernal Hanging Parrot, Oriental White-eye, Black-rumped Flameback and Purple Sunbird. A Coppersmith Barbet was spotted and photographed by Dr Samuel. We noticed some Giant Squirrels hopping from one branch to another and running up and down the trees.

Vernal Hanging Parrot (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Indian Giant Squirrel (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

After a long walk around the forest, a delicious South Indian breakfast arranged for the team by the Forest Department revived our energy. Small trees of wild curry leaves were seen in abundance. Tropical shrubs and small trees of *bixa orellana*, also known as Lipstick Trees, looked really pretty in the bright sun rays. After a while, we noticed a bird of prey soaring high over the dense canopy and making loud, sharp calls. Good photographs of the raptor were clicked by Jayati and Dr Samuel. After a brief discussion based on the photographs, which showed the bird having prominent wide black-and-white bars on the underside of broad flight feathers and tail, and the piercing calls, we concluded that the raptor was a Crested Serpent Eagle and not a Short-toed Snake Eagle as presumed earlier.

Crested Serpent Eagle
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

We continued walking up a trail and saw a huge owl land on one of the trees. Everyone aimed their cameras for a good shot, but due to the long distance and the number of trees coming in the way, most of the shots turned out to be grainy, except for one clicked by Dr Pravin. An inspection of the snaps showed the prominent ear tufts and helped identify the owl as a Brown Fish Owl.

In the midst of this commotion we heard the calls of the Black-hooded Oriole. Some members of the team had seen a Scarlet Minivet and a Greater Yellownape woodpecker. Mr Moorty mentioned spotting a flock of Yellow-wattled Lapwings which I was unlucky to miss. He also added that they had earlier seen a large flock of waders in one of the lakes inside a high-security submarine zone in Vizag.

Alexandrine Parakeet
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Southern Coucal (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

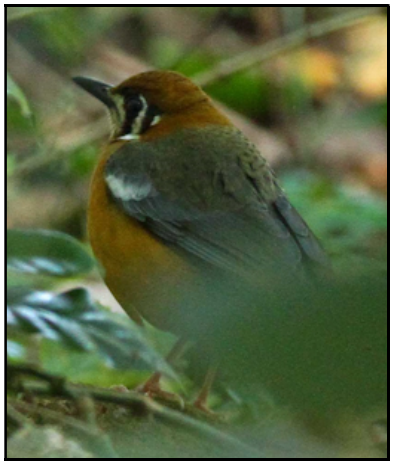
The other common species that we came across there were House Crows, House Sparrows, Common Mynas, Black Kites and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters.

Indian Jungle Crow (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Our forest walks came to an end, and we headed back to Narsipatnam for a quick lunch peppered with fresh strawberries offered by Mr Ajitkumar. Later in the day, we got back to Vizag to catch our Hyderabad-bound train.

Besides the birds, this trip was very enriching in terms of flora and varied lush green coffee and pepper plantations which I had seen for the very first time. From my end, I believe the total bird count would be around 50+ species.

Jungle Myna (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)



Orange-headed Thrush (Photo: K Karthik Sai)

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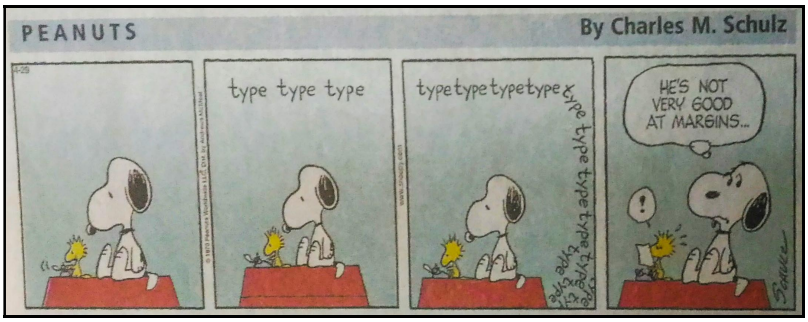
Bird Humour

Umesh Mani



(From The Times of India, October 1, 2012)

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photo: Umesh Mani

Lesser Flamingo (*Phoenicoparrus minor*)

Lesser Flamingo (Jamnagar, February 8, 2019)

Order: Phoenicopteriformes
Family: Phoenicopteridae
Genus: *Phoenicoparrus*
Species: *P. minor*
Size: 90-105 cm

Description & distribution: The Lesser Flamingo is one of the two species of Flamingos seen in India, and the smallest of all the Flamingo species. It is a tall rosy-white stork-like bird with long spindly legs, an overall pinkish-white plumage, and a heavy dark bill with a pronounced kink. While the Lesser Flamingo is smaller than the Greater, it is not a reliable diagnostic indicator in the field unless the two species are together, since the size can vary considerably between the sexes too. The bill, which has crimson feathers at the base, is the feature that most easily differentiates the Lesser Flamingo from the Greater, which has a more pink bill with a dark tip. In flight, the crimson and black underwings, and the shorter trailing legs, are diagnostic.

Post breeding, its movements are erratic; it is seen in the Little Rann of Kutch, Sambhar Salt Lake in Rajasthan, Point Calimere in Tamil Nadu, Pulicat Lake in Andhra Pradesh, Chilika Lake in Orissa, and several other inland waterbodies.

Habitat & behaviour: The Lesser Flamingo is generally seen in flocks in lakes or other water bodies with shallow water. It feeds primarily on the Spirulina algae which, though itself blue-green in colour, contains the photosynthetic pigments that give the Flamingo its pink hue. Since Spirulina grows only in very alkaline lakes, the presence of Flamingos indicates the alkaline nature of the water, making it unsuitable for irrigation.

The Flamingo feeds by swiveling its bill in the water as it walks along, and the bill is specialised for filtering tiny food items. The call is a harsh croaking call, usually uttered in flight.

Nesting: Besides Africa, which is its main breeding ground, the Lesser Flamingo has been known to breed in some parts of the Rann of Kutch, and the Zinzuwadia and Purabcheria salt pans in north-western India. The breeding season, usually June to July, can extend up to January the next year; during this period, the Lesser Flamingo lays its single chalky-white egg on a mound built of mud. Soon after hatching, the chicks join communal 'creches' managed by a few adult birds, which lead the chicks by foot to fresh water, a journey of, sometimes, up to 30km.

Local name: The Lesser Flamingo is known as *'Chhota rajhans'* in Hindi, *'Nano balo'* or *'Nano hunj'* in Gujarati, *'Chhota rohit'* in Marathi and *'Vankara mooti konga'* in Telugu.

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For Private Circulation Only
Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani **Email:** bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*